

Planning for the Common Timetable Structure in Secondary Settings from May 2018

Preparations are well underway for Shetland's secondary schools to move to a new common timetable structure in 16 months' time.

From May 2018, secondary schools will operate a slightly longer school day from Monday to Thursday, and a shorter school day on Friday – on an asymmetric, 33 x 50 minute period school week. There will be no change to the overall time pupils spend in school.

As this new common timetable structure is for secondary schools, the only primary settings potentially affected by these changes are the primary departments of Brae High School and the junior high schools.

The decision to move to this common timetable structure for all secondary settings in Shetland was made by the Shetland Learning Partnership in 2015. The 'asymmetric week' is already in place in many other local authorities in Scotland – and in Aith Junior High School and Whalsay School in Shetland.

The move leads to some significant advantages:

- 50 minute periods provide good time for teachers to review, introduce, teach and evaluate lessons
- A 33 period week makes the best use of teachers' contractual time, with up to 27 timetabled periods and 6 periods of non-contact time
- Pupils living in the Halls of Residence are able to travel home on a Friday afternoon rather than Friday evening
- The common timetable helps planning for staff working in more than one school, and provides consistency across all secondary schools

The Head Teachers of Anderson High School, Baltasound Junior High School, Brae High School, Mid Yell Junior High School and Sandwick Junior High School are now discussing the future shape of school days with their parent councils. It's planned to have all the school day timings set by April 2017, with information then shared with parents.

Officers from Shetland Islands Council's Children's Services will also discuss the changes with groups such as local employers, the college sector, the Shetland Recreational Trust, Shetland Arts, the voluntary sector, local teaching and other unions, and child-care providers.

Staff have also been working with Transport Planning colleagues over the last year around any transport implications, and this will continue over the coming months.

Meanwhile, SIC's Youth Services are working with young people to explore the opportunities for Friday afternoon activities to take account of the earlier end to the secondary school day.

The project is being led by Robin Calder, Quality Improvement Officer: "An enormous amount of work is going into making sure the new structure meets the needs of everyone – from pupils, teachers and parents to employers and unions. That will continue for the next 18 months, and we'll make sure we're talking to everyone concerned to make the transition as smooth as possible. In the meantime, if any parent needs to talk through the changes at this stage, we'd ask them to contact their Head Teacher."

Decisions on the Common Curriculum Structure for Shetland's Secondary Settings

Shetland Islands Council has confirmed arrangements for a common curriculum structure from May 2018 when all secondary schools in Shetland move to the asymmetric, 33 period school week.

The key features of the common curriculum structure are:

- An S1 to S3 Broad General Experience, providing young people with the opportunity to experience a range of learning across all of the curricular areas, in line with the parameters of Curriculum for Excellence.
- An element of flexibility included in the S1 to S3 curriculum structure to enable schools to develop programmes to meet their learners needs and their local circumstances.
- In S3, the final year of the Broad General Education, young people will have the opportunity to personalise their learning in up to nine learning options, completing their entitlement to a broad general education. Learning in S3 will also contribute to learning for qualifications in the Senior Phase, as outlined in recent Education Scotland guidance.
- In the Senior Phase, from S4 to S6, a range of pathways and programmes will be offered to young people, including school based subjects at National, Higher and Advanced Higher level, foundation apprenticeship programmes at Shetland College and NAFC Marine Centre, volunteering and other wider achievement opportunities to support them into positive destinations beyond school.
- Within this structure, young people will have a choice of seven subjects in all secondary settings in S4, providing a manageable number of qualifications for young people to work towards and retaining a breadth of experience in S4.

Helen Budge, Director of Children's Services commented: "A huge amount of work has taken place during 2016 engaging with and listening to the views of all our stakeholders, including young people, teachers, parents and school managers. This decision will provide clarity for our schools and enables us all to move forward to a new curriculum structure and curriculum timetable from May 2018. It will also provide consistency and cohesion for our young people where transitions regularly take place during their secondary experience."